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ABSTRACT

Chapter 12 of a revised volume on school leadership, this chapter discusses ways for administrators to enlist community support through coalition-building. To counter insufficient tax revenues and citizen apathy, today's administrator must be a political strategist adept at identifying and recruiting potential school allies and helping divergent groups work collaboratively. Coalitions are variously named (partnerships, local education funds, alliances, or foundations) and serve many purposes. Coalitions may embrace a broad-based school improvement effort or attempt to accomplish specific objectives (such as passing a tax measure) or manage particular projects (such as an antidrug program). Coalitions may be formally constituted (like local education funds in urban areas) or informally organized to enlist school suport by targeting a specific community sector through networking activities. Initiators of coalitions may be school district officials or community leaders. If the district assumes the initiative, then it will have a major role in shaping the coalition. Chapter sections on initiating and operating a coalition and obtaining the support of key groups (parents, the power structure, local businesses, the school board, and other groups) are aimed at school leaders assuming the coalition-building initiative. (MLH)

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John Thomas, Thomas E. Hart, Stuart C. Smith

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Chapter 12
Building Coalitions

John Thomas, Thomas E. Hart, Stuart C. Smith

In recent years many school leaders have decided it is no longer enough merely to have a dialogue with the community in which they explain the district's needs and find out what the community wants. When tax revenues are insufficient to fund excellence and citizens are apathetic, these leaders reason, it is time to go *into* the community and aggressively enlist support for schools. Thus administrators in progressive districts are becoming coalition-builders; they are learning the skills of a political strategist who identifies potential allies of the schools, recruits them to the cause, and helps the divergent groups overcome their differences so they can work together.

Coalitions and the process of forming them vary greatly from place to place. They can be formal or informal, be temporary or permanent, meet regularly or not at all, deal with one issue or many. In some cases, coalitions—going under such names as partnerships, local education funds, alliances, or foundations—represent a broad-based community effort to improve the school system as a whole. In other cases, the coalitions seek to accomplish specific objectives (such as passage of a tax measure) or manage particular projects (such as an antidrug program).

In still other cases the coalition-building process aims not to create an organization but rather to enlist the support of any number of segments of the community for the educational system. Such support may take the form of volunteer work for the schools, yes votes at budget election time, donated supplies, parental encouragement of their children to do well in school, or simply community good will. In this sense, the coalition-builder is merely applying proven principles of effective public relations while orchestrating the efforts of various groups or individuals on behalf of the schools.

Guided by this broad conception of coalition-building, we have written this chapter both for school leaders who want to build formally organized coalitions and those who want to appeal to and garner the support of key constituencies through informal contacts. Following a brief look at some examples of coalitions, we discuss the process of initiating and operating organized coalitions. Then, the remainder of the chapter advises school leaders on how to establish informal supportive relationships with parents and other members of the community, including state and local government agencies.

Examples of Coalitions

In one informal coalition-building effort, a superintendent in a small

Northwest town meets with loggers over morning coffee, with ministers of the churches, and with other groups he has identified. In another district, school officials accommodated the needs of an active senior citizens group by installing special equipment in the district's swimming pool. This district also gives senior citizens Booster Passes so they can attend sports events and use school facilities. These examples show how school officials, with creativity and initiative, can find ways of generating support for schools even among the most unlikely constituents.

Examples of formally constituted coalitions are the many local education funds (LEFs) in urban areas across the country. LEFs are local independent groups of community leaders who work to improve the quality of public education. Each fund has a stated mission, bylaws, board of directors, and hired director. According to the network's 1988 handbook, LEFs have served to reduce the isolation of the public schools, restore confidence in the schools, and generate local money for school improvement.

Another example of a formally organized coalition is Denver's Public Education Coalition, which began in 1984 to address problems facing public education in the metropolitan area. A series of issues starting with a segregation case in the late 1960s, a loss of population, and a financial crisis because of the fall in oil prices served to spur community members to "build constituencies supportive of public education and to increase involvement in and awareness of the schools so that the community begins taking responsibility for educating our children." says Susan Zimmerman, the coalition's executive director.

North Clackamas School District, south of Portland, Oregon, provides an example of a coalition formed to assist the district's business operation. No immediate issue gave rise to the action, but rather an idea that the local school district should make sure the public is getting a product it wants and needs. In November 1982 the school board approved the formation of a business-advisory task force. William Dierdorff, the district's business manager, writes that, although the task force was "initially formed to improve the business practices of the district and strengthen the linkage between the district and the business community, it was soon discovered that this relationship could prove beneficial to all—the district, the business community, and the community in general."

As these examples show, the initiative to form coalitions sometimes is taken by school district officials and other times by community leaders. If the district takes the initiative, then it will have a major role in shaping the coalition's mission. It must also be prepared to allocate some resources (time and some funds), both initially and as an ongoing commitment. The sections that follow are addressed to school officials with the assumption that they are taking the lead in forming coalitions with their communities.

Initiating a Coalition

In any community many disparate groups are in positions to assist or

hinder school projects. If a coalition is to be a constructive force in supporting the schools, the groups involved must be able to work together to fulfill the goals of the coalition. A school district that wants to solicit participation in a coalition should be able to identify, on the basis of its knowledge of the community, major groups that can be asked to be "a part of the action."

Identifying Members

To determine potential members, the coalition builder can compile a list in three categories as suggested by Terry Black:

> (1) all of the "natural" allies—individuals, groups, types of people—who may share the concern and support a similar position; (2) all of the types of persons, groups, and social structures likely to be affected by the issue or position taken—both affirmatively or negatively; and (3) all potentially interested and civic-minded groups who might stand to gain indirectly by supporting the same issue or constituents.

Another way to identify groups is a community information questionnaire, which can be used to gather data about the political, social, economic, and power bases in the district. The Michigan State Board of Education recommends that the district compile a fact sheet displaying such data. The board says the analysis of the community should include descriptions of (1) the community demography (formation and development of neighborhoods and their styles, patterns of land use and zoning, general population statistics); (2) the community power structure (the persons or groups that influence community decisions); and (3) the community life support systems (communication, culture, housing, law, recreation, and so forth). This information is the starting point for determining the constituencies from which coalition members will be recruited.

Several examples clarify how a coalition might be constituted. The New York Alliance for the Public Schools brings together the leadership of the Board of Education; the United Federation of Teachers; the Council of Supervisors and Administrators; the United Parents Association; corporate, civic, and community leaders; and a working consortium of the deans of education at five universities. This might seem a large group, but the alliance has a large number of diverse projects in which different groups participate to varying degrees.

The Allegheny Conference Education Fund has twenty-one corporate financial contributors and enjoys the cooperation of business and civic leaders, members of the Pittsburgh Board of Education, previous and current school superintendents, the district's administrative staff, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers leadership, and teachers, principals, and students of the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

The Public Education Coalition of Denver includes on its board the

superintendents of four Denver metro area school districts, school board members, teacher union leaders, and business executives.

Contacting and Recruiting Members

Once potential members of the coalition are identified, the next step is, in Black's words, "to develop a strategy for selling" the coalition to potential participants. Black emphasizes that the coalition builders must clearly understand and be able to appeal to the potential members' self-interest, for the "pursuit of self-interest is fundamental to effective political action."

Districts will be better able to attract groups to the coalition if they can clearly demonstrate how the members will benefit from participation. For example, the North Clackamas School District lists the benefits businesses that join its Partnerships in Education coalition can expect to receive:

- better educated students who may one day be your more productive employees
- the opportunity to directly affect the quality of your local schools and ultimately, your community
- an improved quality of life for your employees' families through neighborhood stability and community spirit
- use of the school's resources for special classes, training programs or physical fitness activities
- the satisfaction of helping students understand the business world as they prepare themselves for careers

When taking their "sales pitch" to the key persons in the targeted organizations, coalition organizers should not only ask for help in developing the coalition, but also actively welcome ideas, Black advises. The goal is to enable all participants to feel a sense of ownership in the coalition's direction.

The final step in forming the coalition, Black says, is "to invite representatives of all allied organizations to an area-wide meeting to make a formal/official decision about whether to form a coalition, how the coalition should be structured, and what coalition strategies and activities to initiate."

In an alternative process for recruiting members, Lynda Martin-McCormick suggests that groups be contacted in a systematic way, consisting of three steps. First, a member of the recruitment committee phones the prospective members to find out if their organizations are interested in joining. Second, given a positive answer, the committee sends a letter inviting the organization to join the coalition and outlining exactly what is expected of coalition members and how they will relate to the goal. Third, the committee meets with the new member. At the meeting they discuss ways that the two organizations will be able to work together. This meeting may be followed by a formal letter of acceptance and commitment to participate in the work of the coalition.

Establishing a Governing Board

All formally organized coalitions have governing boards that establish

policy and (if such will be a function) generate funds. So that the board will be credible to all participants, its composition should be representative of all segments of the community that the coalition wishes to include. If there is a large industrial base, then leaders of prominent industries should be included; if there is a university, then appropriate faculty or administrators could be invited; if it is a farming area, representatives from that sector might be appropriate. Most boards include members from the area churches, banks, chambers of commerce, and civic groups. The school district can be represented by such individuals as a school board member, the superintendent, a principal, a teacher, and a representative of the teachers union.

In cases where the coalitions operate independently of the school system, the education representatives may not form a substantial proportion of the board membership. Instead, most board members are leaders in the community. This situation should not be disturbing to school district personnel, because the coalition's raison d'etre is to find additional sources of expertise for the district. In fact, in some coalitions, the superintendent may not even serve as a board officer, though he or she could certainly be a board member. The same might also apply to participation by the teachers union or the school board. Local conditions, which dictate the need for the composition of the coalition, will also determine how to constitute its leadership.

Once the board is established, a common practice is to form committees to oversee the coalition's planned projects. This will help to divide the work and will enable individual committees to enlist the help of additional participants as needed. One committee might also be established to draw up bylaws or regulations, which are necessary if the coalition is to become involved in fund raising. Bylaws are required as part of a 501(c)(3) application, which is a request to the Internal Revenue Service for a letter of determination that clarifies the organization's nonprofit status for tax purposes. A lawyer should file the articles of incorporation and handle the (501)(c)(3) application.

Operating the Coalition

Because the very nature of a coalition brings together disparate groups and individuals who do not have a history of working together, the biggest challenge will be to keep the parties cooperating on the task at hand. Conflicts can threaten the coalition's unity unless it follows procedures that enable the members to work harmoniously. A related issue is the need to maintain open communication between the coalition and the school district.

Anticipating and Dealing with Conflicts

"Internal group conflict is inevitable, should be anticipated, and treated constructively as part of the process of coalition building," states the California State Department of Education. Indeed, Black warns that "the coalition

landscape is a minefield." Issues of turf and pecking order arise continually, he says, because the members are organizers and leaders in their fields. Black lists some of the difficulties coalitions can expect to face:

> Coalitions (1) may divert energy and resources from an organization's own priority issues; (2) take positions contrary to a member organization's interest or policy; (3) may use a consensus process for decision-making that is slow and sometimes cumbersome, resulting in a weakened position on some issues; and (4) may, due to differences among organizations, be prevented from taking as strong a stand or moving as swiftly as possible on an issue.

Another common problem is that a participant will try to steer the coalition to a decision that will benefit primarily that one member. Consequently, the California State Department of Education advises the coalition to "avoid exclusiveness or domination by any one particular type of group."

Martin-McCormick claims that, in the case of a coalition formed around a particular campaign issue, the most difficult problem may be that coalition members will conflict on issues not central to the campaign. Thus she advises the campaign coordinators and other coalition leaders

> to keep everyone focused on the campaign and its plans. Acknowledge that member organizations are involved in other things and rightly so, but be clear that those issues and involvements are for their time outside the campaign.

Even the coalition's meeting place can be a source of contention. A neutral site is preferable. The Public Education Fund Network suggests that the coalition establish a distinct physical presence in the community by having an office and a meeting place not in a school, but in the community, such as the chamber of commerce or a corporate center.

To withstand the tensions that occur in any group decision-making process, participants should brush up on their interpersonal communications and conflict resolution skills. Perhaps a representative from the school district, such as a counselor, could lead the group in some communications and conflict resolution exercises.

If members might be insensitive to particular cultural differences that exist in the group, the following recommendtions by the California State Department of Education are appropriate:

> Create an environment supportive of differences in attitudes and appearances of the coalition members.
>
> Appreciate verbal and nonverbal forms of expression based on ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and other differences.
>
> Be tuned in to subtle signs of disaffection or lack of participation that may be directly related to group differences.

Black advises the coalition to "pull together rather than work on a

hierarchical basis." Because the coalition could be likened to a small United Nations of sovereign states, decisions must be made through the consent of all participants. To help build unity, the component organizations should periodically express their commitment to the coalition's work and goals.

Although close interpersonal relationships can help the coalition to function smoothly, members must realize the coalition is not a club. The members represent their respective organizations, Black points out, and therefore they must, on any issue, state the organization's opinions, which may not necessarily conform to their own. Those who propose an issue should not take for granted the way an individual will vote. Instead, they should sound out each member's opinion as a voting representative, and in that way be better aware of how a proposal might fare.

Robert Freeman gives some additional suggestions of steps coalitions can follow to operate with minimum conflict from their inception:

- determine the appropriate function for each member organization in the coalition, distinct from what it did before being in the coalition
- build into the coalition sufficient rewards for each member organization
- establish improved working relationships and control mechanisms
- determine whether or how the coalition should be expanded to include more resource agencies and more target groups
- fund the coalition on a long term basis
- maximize integration of efforts while providing necessary autonomy
- set priorities for approaching various audiences for support
- evaluate effectiveness with specific audiences, as an organizational structure, with the general public

As with any cooperative activity, an awareness of potential difficulties serves to focus attention on productive ways to help the group accomplish its purpose. Motivating the members to work together harmoniously is the realization that they can attain goals that are beyond the reach of each member working alone.

Communication between District and Coalition

Another prerequisite for the effective functioning of an educational coalition is ongoing communication between the coalition and the schools it is intended to support. Maintaining such communication can itself be hazardous, because, as the Committee for Economic Development notes, "schools and businesses differ in the ways in which people work." Collaborative efforts involving business and school-based personnel must take these differences in style and expectations into account in order to avoid conflicts.

One difference, for example, is the time frame in which participants are accustomed to working. The business person, used to fast-paced meetings and quick decisions, may have to learn to be patient and wait somewhat longer to see results. In turn, as Dierdorff points out, the school district should also recognize that the desired results require a group of action-oriented people who do not want to waste time; therefore, timeliness must be readied and projects completed as promised in a "business-like" manner.

One effective way to facilitate collaboration between the coalition and the district is to have the district designate some personnel as "linkage agents." These agents will establish regular stable patterns of contact between members of the coalition and the district. In small communities, the superintendent or another designated administrator might be able to provide this linkage, whereas in larger settings where coalitions embrace many different groups, the task will have to be shared among several agents. In one large school district, for example, the principals take turns attending meetings of neighborhood associations and then write up summaries of the meetings for distribution to other administrators in the district.

Whether the district has one linkage agent or many, what matters is that each agent is fully committed to his or her role as a bridge between the school district and the segment of the community with which he or she interacts. The agent must also keep in mind that the coalition and its component groups, while committed to the improvement of the district and its programs, are not a part of the administrative structure of the district. This mutual understanding of and respect for the roles and the expertise of all participants will be crucial to the coalition's operation and projects.

From this survey of the steps involved in initiating and operating formally organized coalitions, we now go on to consider how school leaders can interact with particular constituencies whose support is critical for the success of schools.

Obtaining the Support of Key Groups

The report *A Nation at Risk* concluded with the plea

> that all segments of our population give attention to the implementation of our recommendations. . . . Reform of our educational system will take time and unwavering commitment. Help should come from students themselves; from parents, teachers and school boards; from colleges and universities; from local, State, and Federal officials; from teachers' and administrators' organizations; from industrial and labor councils; and from other groups with interest in and responsibility for educational reform.

As well as encouraging the community to become involved in school reform, this language is also an invitation for school leaders to go to the community for help in the process of school improvement. In a community that al-

ready has a high level of concern for the quality of its educational system, people will welcome the offer of specific opportunities to assist their schools. Even in communities where such concern is lacking, school administrators can generate support through many of the suggestions presented here. The following sections explain how to contact and elicit support from parents, the community in general, members of the power structure, school advisory councils, key communicators, local businesses, school board members, and government agencies.

Parents

Undoubtedly, the group most affected by what goes on in schools and most likely to lend their support is parents. David Green calls parent/teacher organizations "gold mines," if an administrator knows how to extract ore from them effectively. By making school facilities available to parents for extracurricular and enrichment activities, he says, a Connecticut grade school was able to build a strong, supportive school/community relationship. Some of the activities cosponsored by the school and the parent-teacher organization included an advanced reading program, computer literacy assistance, minicourses, and a school beautification program.

Lew Armistead says parent-teacher conferences and open houses at the school are effective ways for parents to meet teachers and learn about the school. The trick, he says, is to get them to attend. Initially, it may be helpful to survey parents to find out what would interest them. The survey should cover a good cross-section of parents, not just PTA officers or the presidents of booster organizations.

When trying to encourage parents to attend school events, students can be your best salespeople, Armistead says. The success of this strategy rests on communicating the importance of the event to the students. Once this is accomplished, you can then rely on them to recruit their parents. The event should involve activities that would, in turn, encourage students to attend with their parents.

Armistead suggests beginning an evening program with student entertainment or a simple, inexpensive dinner—possibly a popular food such as spaghetti. Bands, choruses, or glee clubs can be of enormous help, he says, but an imaginative administrator can also enlist the help of home economics classes in the food preparation, making it more of a whole-school program. At the same time, this experience gives students practical hands-on experience and allows everyone—musical and nonmusical students, alike—to make a contribution and be involved.

Since much of what parents learn about schools comes from the children, one obvious way to improve the quality of that information is to make the children more effective news-gatherers. Some schools, for example, have begun programs in which lower-grade children make daily entries in journals. In this way, the children have a clearer, more detailed, often more interesting answer to the familiar parental question: What did you do today? Since praise

is more pleasant than criticism, some schools personally contact parents about their children's successes, instead of reserving such contact for discussion of disciplinary or academic problems.

George Pawlas suggests additional means of making positive contact with parents: written comments by the principal on students' papers, a monthly principal's newsletter, a student reading program, the organization of a school improvement council (which includes parents and students as members), and parental visits and lunches at the school.

The implication of these stratagems is clear: few parents fail to feel empathy or support for educators after they have visited schools or classrooms in person. Once the educator—teacher, principal, or staff member—has a face and a name, actual support is more likely, including encouragement for their students to work harder at school.

The Community

Whereas parents have a direct stake in the success of their school system, other members of the community may have to be convinced that a strong educational system is also in their own interest. By reaching out to segments of the community that have no direct ties to the schools, school leaders can turn apathy or even opposition into active supports.

Schools that have succeeded in forging strong ties with their communities have used five major strategies, say Bruce Wilson and Gretchen Rossman, who examined data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's "Secondary Schools Recognition Program." Schools having strong "collaborative links" with their communities follow this pattern:

- *They actively recruit human resources.* The schools seek volunteers to perform clerical duties, serve as nurse assistants, and teach special skills.
- *They have aggressive PR programs.*
- *They use staff members who are also good communicators as fund raisers.*
- *They invite the community into classrooms and send staff and students into the community.* Students visit nursing homes, assist local charities, and stage musical performances for local recreation departments. In turn, school facilities are open to numerous community social activities.
- *They establish an identity for the school.* Schools use signs at roadsides, fly school flags all over town, and use other means to identify the school with the community.

The outcome of these strategies, say Wilson and Rossman, is a general strengthening of the school, which is able to tap an enormous pool of expertise, multiply its resources, and often greatly improve programs at little or no extra cost.

Larry Hughes and Gerald Ubben advise school leaders to let the com-

munity in to the schools. A series of properly organized seminars, attended by people from a cross-section of attitudes and orientations in the community, may be a good way to begin, even if they are actually "gripe sessions" initially. Once underway, this approach lays the groundwork for more sophisticated community involvement programs, and the principal doesn't have to do it all: the discussions can be led by well-informed, well-briefed staff members who are effective discussion leaders.

Committees of citizens, students, and staff can work simultaneously on various educational issues without impinging on either the power of the principal or the school board, say Hughes and Ubben. This type of citizen involvement, the authors say, eases professional workload, dispels apathy, and often leads to valuable solutions.

Steve Toy, superintendent of a small school district in Idaho, cites the example of community involvement in goal setting. In the school district, parents, nonparents, teachers, students, and staff members set goals for themselves to help the district in its "Quest for Excellence." As part of the program, each group of goal setters meets with the superintendent to discuss the goals, and the meeting is followed up by a letter. In this way goals are set that relate to curriculum, standards, expectations, requirements, instructional content and instructional process, quality of performance, community support, available resources, and self-responsibility.

A study of the overall programs for community relations isolated two important intangible qualities, says Toy: personal good will and enthusiasm. This may be because, in a small community, what people do and how they feel affect how well the school runs and how the community feels about it. The enthusiasm is contagious, says Toy, but it must begin at the top and be allowed to "infect" the rest of the community. To do that, he says, you have to share the excitement with everyone involved.

School leaders who successfully involve their communities must be able to make sensitive use of people and their talents, writes Louise Phillipp. It also takes a good eye, she says: you have to be able to pick people out of groups of parents, advocates, public agencies and services, clubs, organizations, schools, health facilities, public officials, government agencies, the clergy, businesses, and professions—people who influence decisions, wherever they are, and who instigate and support action for programs.

The Power Structure

Power, a necessary function in society, is distributed in unequal degrees throughout communities informally or formally, says sociologist Floyd Hunter. Informal power is often held by an elite at the top of their respective social and occupational hierarchies in the form of decision-making capabilities. They are the people you see if you are trying to promote some community program. Without their help, any such project would be risky. Formal power generally resides in elected or appointed officials. In fact, however, people who

are *informally* powerful in a community—although they would not seek or hold an office—nevertheless *influence* those who do.

In a pluralistic society, the schools must serve many publics, each with differing values, emphases, and orientations. According to Hughes and Ubben, the bad news is that it's impossible to encapsulate the kind of organization of power that exists, because few communities reflect that kind of stability. The good news is that the power relationships are not completely random. Although the patterns of influence aren't static, they do have enough stability that you can learn to predict them, after awhile.

Don Bagin, Donald Ferguson, and Gary Marx describe three levels of leadership in a community:

- Visible Leaders—easiest to identify, include people always on committees, councils, drives, plus elected officials.
- Invisible Leaders—harder to identify, often behind the scenes, such as with large financial interests in the community, or with influence in significant political groups within the community; not usually office seekers but involved in getting others elected; selective in allowing names used for endorsements.
- Emerging Leaders—"heirs apparent" who will assume control when current leaders complete terms of office. Many communities recruit, train and mentor these people as a "good investment" in the future.

Educators should be the community's intellectual leaders, Bagin and his colleagues believe, and make a strong connection in the community's collective mind between *learning* and *people in schools*. As a means of identifying community leaders and working with them to build a positive relationship, they say, educators should involve themselves in such things as the local chamber of commerce, charity drives, boards, commissions, and the political system. In the process, the authors observe, there will be ample opportunity for educators to show citizens how the schools can help improve the community and how schools will be affected by proposed changes. The result, in time of need, is a situation in which the educator will be able to turn to colleagues for help, instead of complete strangers.

Advisory Councils

In many school districts, advisory councils are considered a necessity, because some government programs require community participation in school decision-making processes. Some of these groups have an actual vote; others are strictly advisory. In either case, introduction of citizen committees into the school's decision process represents a major change that may make some administrators uncomfortable. Beyond possible extra work and potential frustration advisory councils bring, however, are some clear benefits for administrators seeking public support.

Every community evaluates its schools. The advantage of an advisory council is that it channels public evaluation toward a constructive end. Criticism—based, as it often is, on vague or incomplete understanding—can be reduced when school administrators have a forum where they can respond. Council members with clear facts about the school's strengths and weaknesses can use this same forum to pass their information along to the rest of the community.

But advisory councils or *ad hoc* committees are much more than mere arenas for disseminating school policy or airing collective gripes. The functions of such groups range from determining and prioritizing school objectives to evaluating progress, investigating facility use, and revising curriculum.

Advisory groups also provide a formal process by which opinions from the community can be incorporated into school decisions. With this current, accurate information about their community's needs and expectations, administrators are obviously in a better position to make "good calls" in terms of their decisions.

One of the important factors relating to an advisory council's success or failure as a communications medium is its composition. Ideally, these groups should represent a cross-section of the community. Diversity is not only a plus, here; it is essential.

As Jim Stanton and his colleagues point out, most councils suffer from shortages of minority, low-income, student, nonparent, and (except in leadership positions) male representation. To fill these needs, the active recruitment of these groups will be a necessity. Their past experiences may have made them reluctant to participate in school affairs, or even antagonistic toward the schools. Sometimes these experiences and a lack of confidence in their communications skills when placed alongside more affluent, educated people, may also make them impatient in waiting for changes or unwilling to volunteer for school-related groups. Their recruitment is still a high priority, however.

It's also important to recruit individuals with expertise in areas the council will be considering. Necessary qualities in all participants include interest, time, and the ability to get along with people.

The best way to attract and keep council members is to appeal to their self-interest and demonstrate that they can make a difference. Often, simply asking people to serve on a council or run for office is enough to show them that their services are needed and valued.

Convening an advisory council will thoroughly test the leadership skills of any principal, writes C.C. Carpenter. The principal's most important function will be, on the one hand, to keep the level of participation up and to generate enthusiasm, energy, and activity. On the other hand, the principal must make the council aware of its limits and responsibilities, as well as the possibilities open to it. Governing a citizens advisory council will entail such skills as leading meetings, managing conflict, and sharing power, as well as solving problems alone and jointly with the group and communicating effectively.

Key Communicators

Every community has people who are asked questions about everything—city government, election issues, investments, rising prices, and the local schools. They are respected members of their communities, and educators need to keep them current on school issues and events. Lew Armistead suggests such things as inviting them to school events—an award assembly, a musical or dramatic performance, an athletic event, or a school meeting—as well as putting them on your school's mailing lists. Some schools recruit them as communications or community relations committees.

These "key communicators" are people who talk to large numbers of people, and whom people (again, in large numbers) believe and trust. Key communicators don't have to have high status or membership in some power structure—they are found in the ranks of all professions and trades, and in positions at many levels in the community. They can be barbers and beauticians or mayors and councilors.

The idea works either for individual schools or for the district as a whole, as well as *within* the schools: key communicators can also be members of the student body or your own staff, since both are prime sources of information about the school. If you are effective in making sure your key communicators have accurate information before they share it with people outside the school, say Bagin and colleagues, they can "identify the sparks before they become fires," in terms of rumors and other misinformation. Although it takes time to set up a network of key communicators, most administrators agree that it saves more time than it costs once it's in place and functioning.

This very lack of time that makes it impossible to make more than token contact with the public-at-large makes it mandatory that schools identify and contact the key communicators in their own communities. Cultivation of key communicators can be done informally—with periodic phone calls to discuss school affairs or invitations to lunch at school—or by establishing a formal group and meeting with it regularly.

Because they can generally reach a lot of people quickly, timely contact with them during potential crises can often help defuse controversy, avoid trouble, and deal quickly and effectively with misconceptions about the school.

Because communication is a two-way process, key influentials can also *bring in* information: accurate, immediate feedback on how the community is responding to the school. This feedback can give administrators new perspectives on their schools (as well as their own management styles) and make it easier to identify potential problems and areas of dissension. In addition, these people can often serve as sounding boards, enabling administrators to test public reaction to new ideas in advance.

Local Businesses

In recent years, writes Santee Ruffin, urban education has been return-

ing to what can be called the "educational mainstream." Observers note a return of such things as an emphasis on professional accountability and on the principal as the instructional leader, as well as a return to a stronger school/business relationship.

"Long-term economic growth is tied directly to the performance of public education," Richard Lesher, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, was quoted as saying in 1985. U.S. businesses have rallied to the standard of education as the key to not only a sound economy but the overall quality of life in their communities. Consequently, business leaders are actively seeking partnerships with educators.

Bagin, Ferguson and Marx caution that such plans must be carefully thought out and candidly discussed to avoid destructive misunderstandings and crucial loss of ground. Further, the authors point out that most educators will *not* be dealing with large corporations, since most communities have mostly small businesses: 90 percent of all U.S. businesses have fewer than 50 employees.

Again, say Bagin and colleagues, it's a matter of getting to know groups and individuals within this sector:

- Determine what local businesses expect from schools.
- Survey businesses in the area.
- Learn local businesses' perception of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Find out what skills graduates will need to get available jobs.

A wise educator is one who works to show businesses how they can benefit from the schools through additional services such as adult education, community education, or retraining programs. Bagin and his colleagues recommend an early investigation based on one basic question: What can you do for them?

They suggest inviting businesspeople to survey their employees and managers about what kind of additional training or classes they would like, adding those offerings to the adult/community education program, and accommodating these courses in the schools.

For their part, businesses typically have helped schools through such practices as these:

- corporate loan of executives to schools
- analysis of school business and personnel practices in a consultant or advisory capacity
- service as resource people in classrooms
- design of curricula
- financial, material, and human resource support through Adopt-A-School-type programs

In many cases, the business community has invited students into its domain through tours, internships, and special projects. Beyond preparing students for future jobs and careers, Bagin and his coauthors point out, businesses

have also promoted and actually provided immediate and/or short term, entry-level employment for students.

Perhaps most important for the educator to remember, say Bagin and colleagues, is the natural tendency for schools and businesses to ally. Both are concerned with the long- and short-term community life. Political alliances, for example, are valuable in building support for better schools in the state legislature, as well as before school bond or finance elections.

The authors warn against too great a dependence on business support, however. Contributions from businesses obviously help, but the bulk of school support should come from taxpayers. Differences in size and finances between businesses from one community to the next could lead to greater inequities with regard to the resources for schools. Businesses should always supplement, not supplant, financial support from the community.

School Boards

When school leaders seek to build support for education, they should not overlook school board members, who are important elements in the coalition-building process. Armistead, one of several authors who regard school boards as another, distinct portion of the surrounding community, suggests tapping into your own school resources as a way of building good will between the two offices and strengthening the bond between board and principal. Have the school glee club or chorus perform a few songs at one of the less hectic board meetings, for example.

Board members, as elected representatives, have their own followings in the community and, if they are good representatives, are aware of their constituents' views. By being aware of board members in this capacity, administrators can use the board to sound out public opinion and to serve as a channel for communicating school needs to particular segments of the community.

For instance, school boards can communicate effectively with other governing bodies. Steve Toy writes that the Oxford, New York, board of education meets three times a year with the town board and the village board. These "tri-board" meetings have provided a means to increase community involvement in the schools.

Government Agencies

Contact with elected officials has indeed become an extremely important role, not only of the school board, but of school and district administration. As the elected office's scope and power increase, so does its impact on local education—whether it's an agency providing federal money, a regulation that causes unending problems, or a state action that actually makes it easier to provide top quality education. Either way—curse or blessing—government relations have come to be a top priority for administrators.

Bagin, Ferguson, and Marx provide some helpful guidelines for administrators who take seriously their role of influencing the public decision-making process. Whether your district has a key administrator who handles legislative or governmental relations, or whether it doesn't, the authors say, it's not possible to rely completely on one person or group for this important service. Although professional associations and unions play a crucial role in government relations efforts, all school employees must shoulder part of the load.

According to Bagin and his coauthors, government relations involves a variety of efforts:

- Developing cooperative relationships with organizations that share a concern about legislative issues affecting education
- Providing leadership in issues that reach a governmental level of concern
- Working with regulatory agencies and various members of local, state and federal bureaucracies
- Grassroots lobbying activities
- Formation of coalitions focused on issues that have reached governmental level of concern
- Working with non-legislative groups whose support for or against legislation might be needed
- Responding to media inquiries about issues before legislative bodies
- Maintaining contact with political leaders to monitor their stands on educational issues, and sometimes influencing those positions
- Monitoring legislative trends in other communities
- Allying with professional associations and unions for a stronger voice in educational policy-making

Ideally, the school system's goal may be to influence, mitigate, or even lead the process of developing government policy and programs that relate to education, say Bagin and colleagues. Often, however, issues that have reached the decision-making stage in the legislature place the educational institutions in a reactive position: they can only try to limit, control, and repair damage already done. Because of this, say the authors, it's important for educators to keep current and maintain contacts with elected and/or appointed officials. The authors suggest conducting periodic surveys and generally "keeping an ear to the ground." It is also very useful to monitor issues, noting those that could trigger legislative action as they progress, because this changes the educational institution's position from *reactive* to *proactive*. It is better, the authors suggest, to have a hand in shaping educational policy than to be limited to simply reacting.

A proactive government relations program could include these actions:

- writing/initiating legislation cooperatively with elected officials or governmental departments
- negotiating with other groups, governmental departments, and

decision-makers toward issue consensus

- researching potential effects of specific legislation or regulations
- working closely with regulators after the legislative decision is made
- providing expert information and analysis on issues under consideration by government officials
- preparing, coordinating, and providing testimony

School administrators, board members, and parent group representatives can take active roles in this process, say the authors, whether the goal is influencing members of Congress or of the state legislature with regard to issue positions.

Although "lobbying" may have a dirty or unsavory reputation, associated with graft, bribery, and corruption, its primary purpose is "to provide elected and appointed decision-makers with the information they need to make sound decisions," say Bagin and his coauthors. The lobbyist should avoid or minimize "intuitive decision-making" on governmental issues ("Let me tell you what I think my people would say about this") and instead convey knowledge of the subject, process, and constituency. Organized and trained volunteers and a communications network are essential, they say.

To present an official position on an issue with supportable evidence, the authors recommend following these steps:

- Analyzing the issue: What is its potential impact on the school district and programs? Can the impact be measured? What will the impact mean, in terms of funds, staffing programs and the like?
- Analyzing the players: What other groups will be affected? Who is the opposition? What are its positions, strengths, weaknesses? Who are the people behind the issues, and what are their voting records on similar issues? Who are the allies and potential members of coalitions? What is necessary for success? What do you lose, if you fight and win?
- Knowing the process and laws: What is the decision-making process for the group with which you are working? What steps do proposals go through? What happens if it is killed along the way?

Bagin and his colleagues remind us that the process is not over when a particular issue is resolved, a bill passed, or a law changed. As with other groups, government officials or agencies are part of a long-term working relationship, much as other groups already discussed in this chapter. Maintain the contact, say the authors, and things move more smoothly. Invite them to come see you, and go and see them regularly. Write to them, and make sure that they are well-informed about your school and what happens in it.

Conclusion

We have outlined two different but related patterns for building coali-

tions of groups supportive of the schools. One strategy is to form an organization of diverse groups who share the goal of strengthening the community's public educational system. Having chosen a mission for the coalition, the coalition builder identifies and recruits potential members and, if appropriate for the type of coalition that is desired, establishes a governing board. If the coalition's activities require that members work closely together, then the coalition builder or a designated coordinator has the added responsibility of facilitating the decision-making process and helping the members work harmoniously.

Because of their visibility and coordinated efforts, formally organized coalitions can raise the public's consciousness and carry out projects that are beyond the reach of the schools with their limited resources. But such coalitions also require a lot of time and effort to form and operate, and thus they may be feasible only for larger school districts.

An alternative strategy for obtaining the public's support for schools is a less formal process that can be successfully applied in a community of any size and can take as much or little time as a school leader wishes to invest. Instead of recruiting members to an organization, the coalition builder targets particular segments of the community and reaches out to them in an effort to increase their understanding of the schools and solicit their support. We have described a number of techniques school leaders can use to establish those kinds of informal networks with groups ranging from parents to elected local and state officials.

Although their methods differ, both strategies have the same goal: to form alliances with groups external to the schools whose support can help to build a stronger educational system.